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Panel probing Israeli role in Beirut massacre holds 1st meeting

From Wire Services

Jerusalem—The three-man commission investigating Israel's role in the Beirut massacre held its first sitting behind locked doors yesterday on the heavily guarded campus of Jerusalem's Hebrew University.

The inquiry, whose findings could decide the fate of Prime Minister Menachem Begin's government, opened in a former English literature classroom within sight of the Knesset (Israel's parliament).

No formal announcement was made and no witnesses were summoned to the first session, which was understood to have discussed how the investigation would be conducted.

Meanwhile in Beirut, a government official said yesterday that Lebanon was continuing its official investigation of the massacre.

The military prosecutor-general, Assad Germanos, is still working on the investigation, the official said. But the government of President Amin Gemayel has disclosed few details about it.

There is no noticeable pressure from the public, nor from Muslim or Christian political leaders, for an acceleration of the inquiry, or for disclosure of its results.

There has been no public outcry in Lebanon, similar to that in Israel, for a thorough investigation of the massacre. One Muslim political analyst noted that Lebanon had not formed a commission of inquiry as Israel has done. He said the government so far was "investigating the crimes in the camps as if they were like any other crimes, any other murders."

Monday the three commission members visited Beirut with a team of investigators but did not enter the two camps. Peering through binoculars, they viewed the scene from the same positions that Israeli units occu-

pled at the time of the killings.

An official announcement said they also received "clarifications" from deputy chief of staff Moshe Levi and Gen. Amir Drori, commander of Israel's front-line forces in Lebanon.

A commission spokesman said the process of collecting documents had been completed and hearings were to begin today. He said Maj. Gen. Yitzhak Hafi, former head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, and two other army officers, will be called before the inquiry. Defense Minister Ariel Sharon and Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Rafael Eitan will testify early next week, he said.

A decision on whether to open the meeting to the public or keep the sessions closed also will be made next week, the spokesman said. The commission could take three months to present its findings.

The investigators refuse to talk to reporters, and the only information available comes from terse announcements through the government press office.

The head of the commission is Yitzhak Kahan, 69, president of the Supreme Court. The other two members are Supreme Court Judge Aharon Barak, Israel's leading expert on international law, and retired Maj. Gen. Yona Efrat.

The commission has full powers to subpoena anyone from an army private to the prime minister, and to take their testimony under oath. It also has full powers to investigate not only the military aspect but also the political implications.

Meanwhile, the Israeli parliament voted 56-50 yesterday to endorse the Begin government's rejection of a federation between Jordan and a Palestinian West Bank, a key plank in President Reagan's Middle East peace plan.